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ABSTRACT

The trends that are presently converging to make the utilization of the RFP increasingly apparent in Federal funding are discussed. These trends include: (1) greater emphases on social policy issues by the government; (2) increased number of government operated programs; (3) increased management requirements for an operations planning system; (4) increased number of organizations, both private and public, prepared to respond to RFP's; and (5) the uncertainty of unsolicited proposals addressing themselves to policy related research. In connection with the social policy issues, the Federal Government has become involved with issues which have direct or indirect bearing on young children and which, therefore, require information or knowledge about young children. (Author/DB)

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The RFP Route for Developing Knowledge About Young Children

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Agencies in the Federal Government which are in a position to support research activities to develop knowledge about young children have two main routes at their disposal. One in the grant route and the other is the RFP or contract route. The grant route is used extensively for the support of basic or applied research in which the researchers tend to submit unsolicited proposals. The ideas, methodologies, applications and utilizations of the proposed research are usually developed and controlled by the researchers with no necessary relationship between the proposal and the current needs of social policy. The values are seen as contributing to knowledge and encouraging new frontiers of exploration. The review of unsolicited proposals usually includes review by panels of experts, professional staff, and budget management. Grants are awarded according to the merits of the proposals and availability of funds. It is not uncommon for proposals to be approved but not funded because of lack of funds. The grants route to develop knowledge about young children will undoubtedly continue and some agencies, particularly the National Institutes of Health, still fund proposals primarily on a grant bases. The RFP (Request for Proposals) route solicits proposals from the research community, but spells out the specifications of the problem to be researched, the data to be gathered, the probable methodology, the questions to be answered and the product to be delivered within a specified time frame. Announcements of Requests for Proposals are made daily in the Federal Register, published by the Department of Commerce, and are sent to institutions, professional organizations, companies and others who add their names

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to mailing lists in contract offices of the various agencies.

A number of trends are presently converging to make the utilization of the RFP increasingly apparent in Federal funding. These trends include: (1) greater emphases on social policy issues by the government; (2) increased number of government operated programs; (3) increased management requirements for an operations planning system; (4) increased number of organizations, both private and public, prepared to respond to RFPs; and (5) the uncertainty of unsolicited proposals addressing themselves to policy related research.

Social Policy Issues

The Federal Government has increasingly became involved with social policy issues which have direct or indirect bearing on young children and which require, therefore, information or knowledge about young children. To illustrate, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare is presently concerned with two major social policy issues. One is institutional reform and the other is reduction of dependency. Reduction of dependency, to select one of the two, very quickly is translated into family assistance concepts with a training or work requirement.

Training or work requirements open up the question of what to do about children of parents who are absent all day. Concern about children raises a whole set of questions concerning the impact of various day care services on children and their families and the related questions of what program or training models enhance the development of children. The responsible agencies may well issue a series of RFPs to obtain knowledge about the development of effective programs, the assessment of program and training models, and the evaluation of the impact of day care on children and families. They may also be interested in knowing what day care does to reduce welfare

rolls and enhance the economy by providing manpower opportunities; i.e., reduce dependency.

Operating Programs

With the Office of Economic Act of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, to select two prominent pieces of legislation, the Federal government launched into operating programs for young children. Head Start, Follow Through, Planned Variation, Title III Demonstrations, Title I Projects, Health Start, etc., are examples of programs either directly funded and guided by the Federal Government or done so in cooperation with state and local governments or accepted and funded when Federal guidelines are adopted. The need for knowledge about young children as they enter, remain in, and leave these programs is great and no programs have been authorized without an accompanying research and development component. The programs have in many ways determined the kind of research and development needed and the kind of knowledge about young children that had to be acquired. To illustrate, Head Start contains a nutrition aspect to the program. Head Start also contains an educational aspect for cognitive development in young children. A question which is raised, then, may well be: Does the nutrition program of Head Start contribute to cognitive development in addition to the educational program? A number of research designs might well address themselves to answering this question and an RFP might be issued requesting the submission of alternative designs. After a design is selected, a second RFP might be issued requesting proposals to conduct the study based on the selected design. In short, the kinds of knowledge about young children needed are in many ways determined by the kinds of programs legislated.

Management Requirements

The Federal Government has placed increased emphasis on the management of programs and funds. Funds for programs are allocated against priorities which agencies establish and the agencies are held accountable for the achievement of objectives which have clearly specified performance measures. Another shift in management requirements is from an input justification for funds and programs; e.g., how many contracts, how many dollars, to output justification for funds and programs; e.g., what is the product, who benefits and how. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare, where many programs exist for young children, has increased management requirements for an operations planning system. The priorities and allocation of resources inherent in such a system are spelled out and binding. The research plans of the agencies are similarly spelled out and binding. This kind of predetermined research activity lends itself more to the RFP route than relying on unsolicited proposals.

Responders to RFPs

Over the past decade, the number of groups and organizations capable of responding to RPFs has greatly increased. Some of these groups are affiliated with universities, but many are independent institutes or corporations. They have built up a staff or experts in research or bring in such experts for responding to particular RFPs. The purpose of the orgarization is to respond to requests from various government agencies or business groups rather than initiate research proposals on an unsolicited basis. Since the organizations minimize emphasis of specific academic disciplines, they are able to engage in interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary efforts without concern about possible loss of prestige within a given academic discipline. They generally are not dependent on

criteria for advancement and recognition characteristic of academic disciplines within the university structure.

Limitations of Unsolicited Proposals

Unsolicited proposals tend to be submitted by researchers who have fine ideas they wish to test and are requesting funds to support their work. To the extent that the interests of the researchers converge with the social policy of the Government, the support is possible. However, by the very nature of independent research, the researcher rightfully demands complete freedom in what he studies and how he studies it. He tends to feel accountable only to his professional group or discipline and frequently sees any accommodation of his research to the realities of social policy as an intolerable compromise. His contributions to knowledge might be great, but his chances of receiving support funds which seem more necessary for program and policy related issues are reduced.

The problems of the university based, independent researcher, as a part of a professional or discipline community, are well discussed in a document published by AERA, The Educational Research Community: Its Communication and Social Structure, Richard A. Dershimer, Editor, April, 1970. The problems center around whether a research community, like education, should become interdisciplinary or become more autonomous as a separate community around a separate discipline. Further, the relationship of research communities with social policy of the Government was explored as another kind of problem. The problems were not resolved; they were identified and discussed.

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James Gallagher, a discussant on the panel, is a fine spokesman for a new view of the research community. The new view offers ways for the research community to reorganize itself into several kinds

of communities conducting various kinds of research. It requires the retraining of researchers to think in terms of research planning relating to social policy issues. It requires training new kinds of researchers for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research. And it requires the developnent of research synthesizers and interpreters. The results of this new view may permit a more functional and realistic relationship between the research community and Government social policy so that unsolicited proposals are consonant with government social policy, and the RFP no longer seems at odds with researchers. Indeed, the research community may help establish social policy. Dr. Gallagher may want to tell you more about this new view.